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An useful little Essay -

Inaugural Dissertation

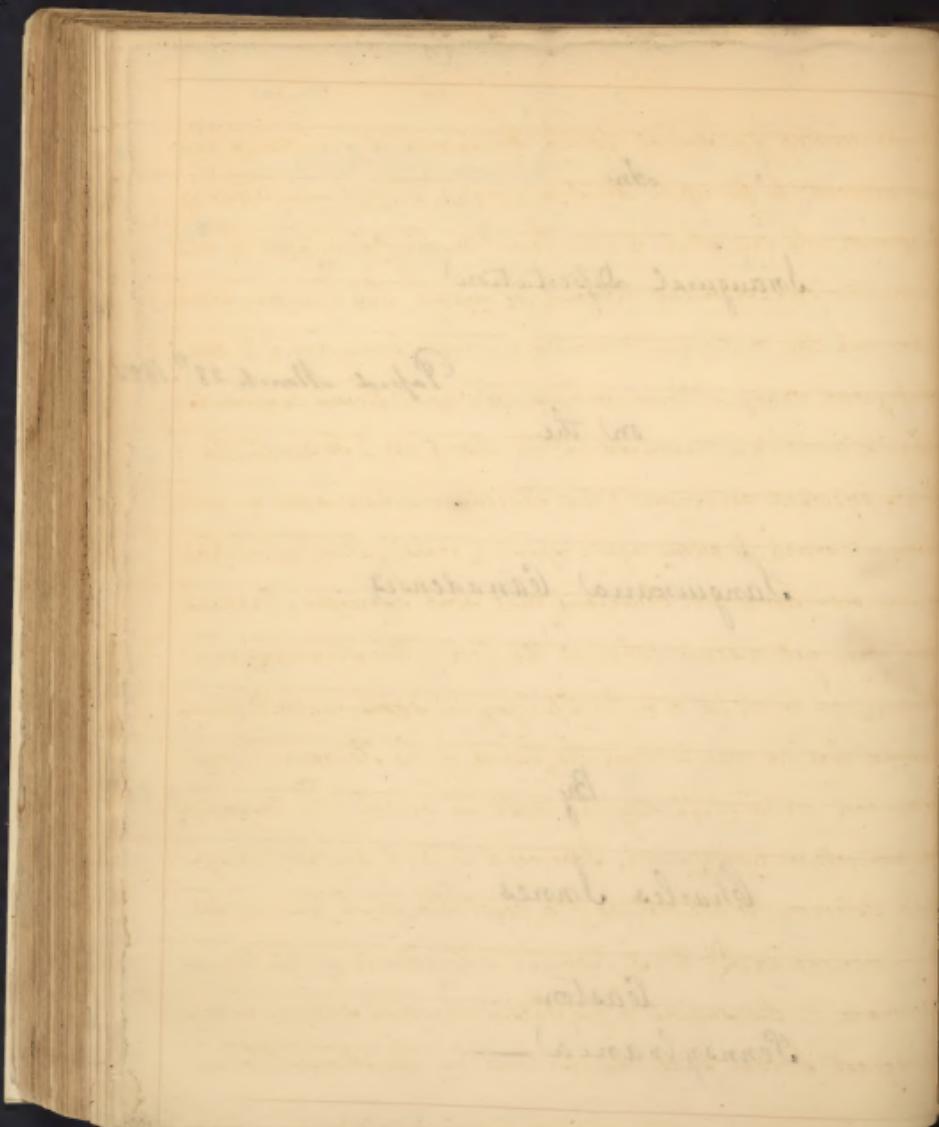
Paperd March 28<sup>th</sup>. 1825  
on the

*Sanguinaria Canadensis*

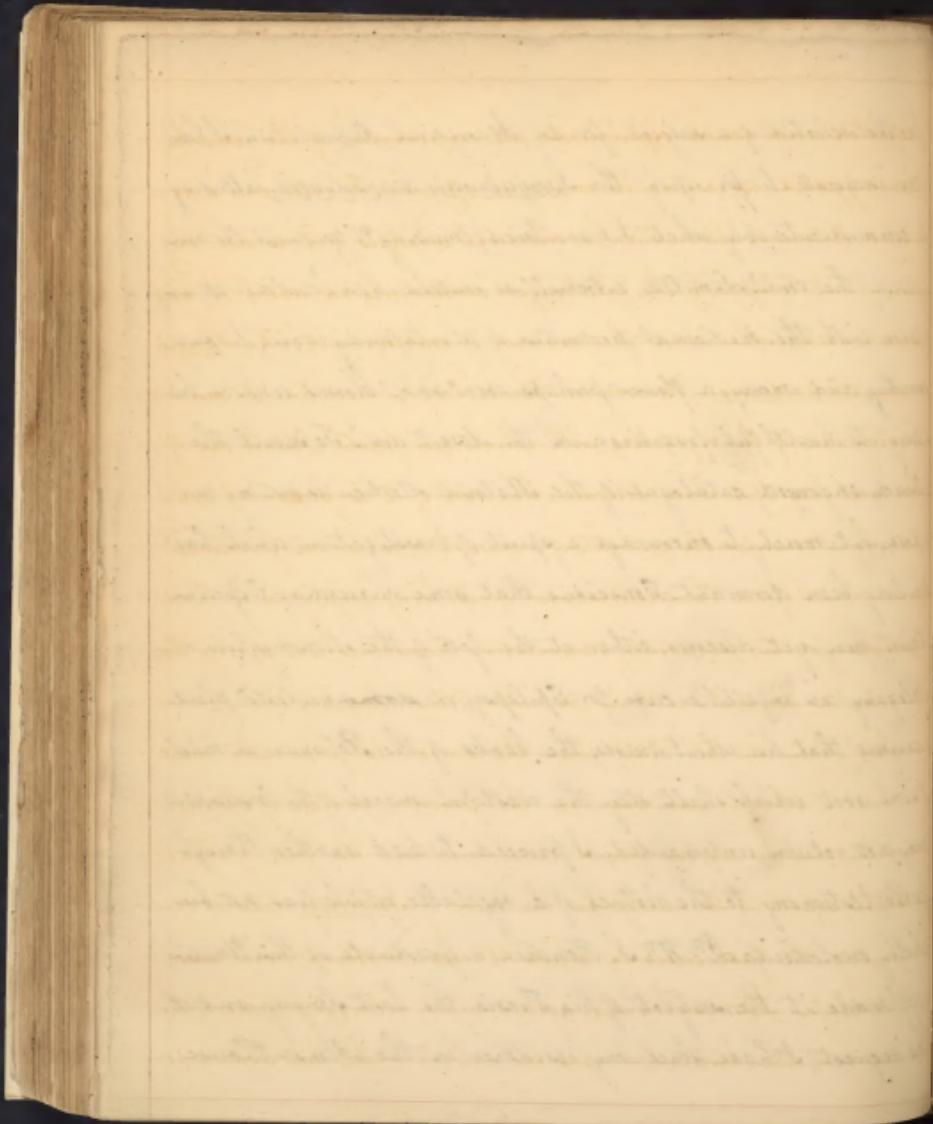
By

Charles Innes

Easton  
Pennsylvania —



In the selection of a subject for an Inaugural Dissertation, I have  
been induced to fix upon the Sanguinaria Canadensis, intending  
to communicate only what I have tried, making Experiment the new  
utility, the end. Limited, extremely so indeed, has been our acquain-  
tance with the medicinal properties of plants indigenous to our  
country and many a flower perhaps even now, "blooms unseen, bear-  
ing its healthful fragrance in the desert air". To swell the  
already engorged catalogue of the Materia Medica is not my pur-  
pose, but merely to encourage a spirit of investigation, which has  
long been dormant. Conscious that some succeeding Experim-  
entalist may yet discover, either at the foot of the Alleghany or  
Appalachian, an infallible cure for Epilepsy, in some neglected plant  
having that he who traverses the banks of the Potowmack, in search  
some root which shall stay the wasteful march of the Consumption,  
ay not return unrewarded, I proceed to add another, though  
vile testimony, to the virtues of a vegetable, which has not been  
fully overlooked: Dr. W<sup>m</sup>. S. Hendrie a graduate of this Uni-  
versity made it the subject of his Thesis, the last Spring, and at  
my request, I have since my residence in the Adams-House,

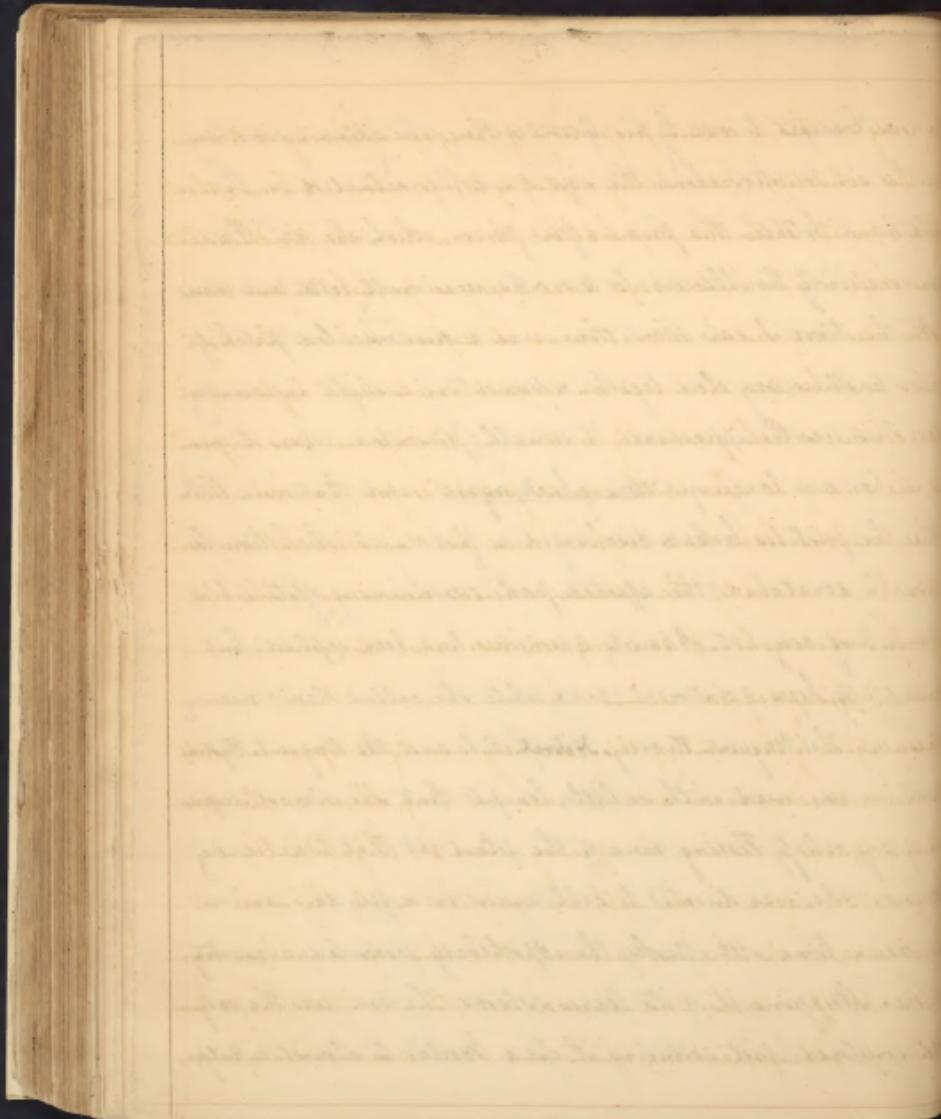


repeated and varied experiments, all confirmatory of the remarks then suggested, respecting its remedial efficacy. To enter into a detailed Botanical description, or chemical analysis of it, is not my design; but to specify the particular complaints in which it has proved serviceable, and the manner of employing it. The Sanguinaria Canadensis - Puccoon or Blood Root is peculiar to our country, and of the vegetables with which our forests abound, one of the most beautiful and delicate: The root of it is perennial, containing a considerable quantity of a reddish or rather orange-coloured juice, which from the circumstance of its being employed by the Indians for the purpose of ornamenting themselves, and dyeing their baskets, has given it one of its popular titles - Indian Paint.

- It flowers in this state when the season is favourable, about the last of March, and even in the common weather of Spring months, may be always found in bloom about the first of April. As the report of its success in the cure of Impetigo was so encouraging, the first cases in which it was employed, were ~~in~~ this class. James Francis, aged 7 years, belonging to one of the afterwards of the Institution, was the subject of the first experiment.

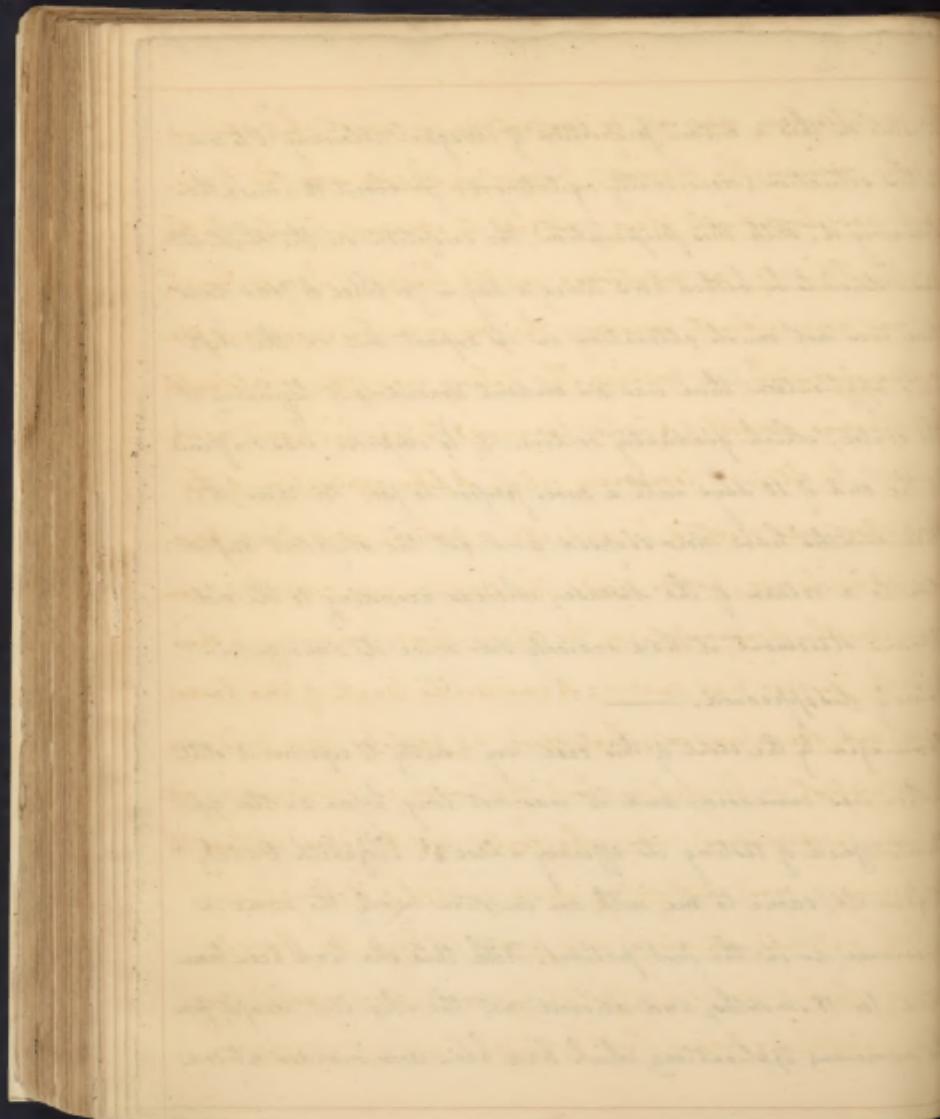
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He was brought to me by his grandmother, who desired something  
one for an eruption about the size of a dollar, situated on the  
right hand between the thumb & fore-finger, which she said had  
been exceedingly troublesome for 6 months, occasionally better and worse.  
At the time I saw him, there was a circumscribed patch of  
yellow pustules, very close together & presenting a slight inflammatory  
tissue: This was the appearance it usually presented, when it was  
to use her own language, "coming back again", and that in a little  
while the pustules broke & discharged a fluid - at which time he  
inevitably scratched the affected part, complaining of its itching  
and feeling very hot. A variety of remedies had been applied, but  
unsuccessfully; boxes of ointment (red & white she called them) meaning  
presume, the Unguent. Hydrog. Nitrat. Rub. and the Unguent. Hydrog.  
zumius, were used with so little benefit, that she almost despair-  
ed of any relief. Having none of the plant at that time in my  
possession, she was directed to call again in a few days, and in  
the mean time, Mr. Clarke the Apothecary procured a quantity  
& me. Stripping it of its leaves & stems, the root was the only  
part employed, first reducing it in a Mortar to almost a pulp,



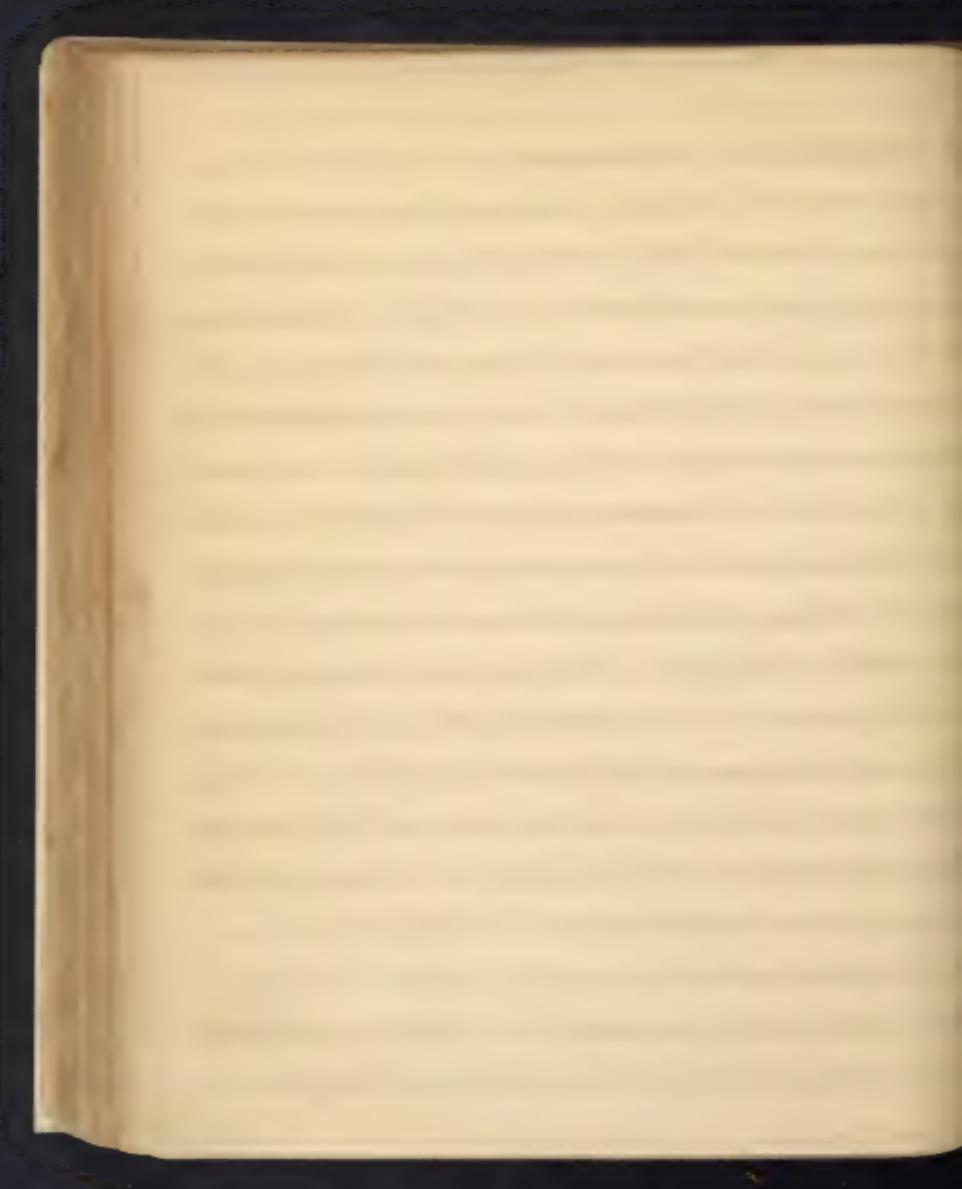
infusing on this a certain proportion of Vinegar - allowing it to remain in this situation (occasionally agitating it) for about 12 hours & then straining it. With this preparation, the eruption on the child's hand was ordered to be bathed 4 or 5 times a day - for three or four days there was not much alteration in its aspect, but on the sixth day's application, there was an evident amendment beginning at the centre, which gradually continuing to improve, was confirmed at the end of 10 days with a cure, perfect so far, for more than three months have now elapsed, and not the slightest disposition to a return of the disease; whereas according to the old Woman's statement, it had scarcely ever since its commencement, entirely disappeared. —

Encouraged by the event of this case, my anxiety to experiment still further was increased; and it was not long, before another opportunity offered of testing its efficacy - Case 2<sup>d</sup>. Elizabeth Davis, 2 years old, came to me, with an eruption nearly the same in appearance, as in the first patient. With this she had been troubled for 18 months, and derived not the slightest benefit from the numerous applications, which had been recommended & tried.



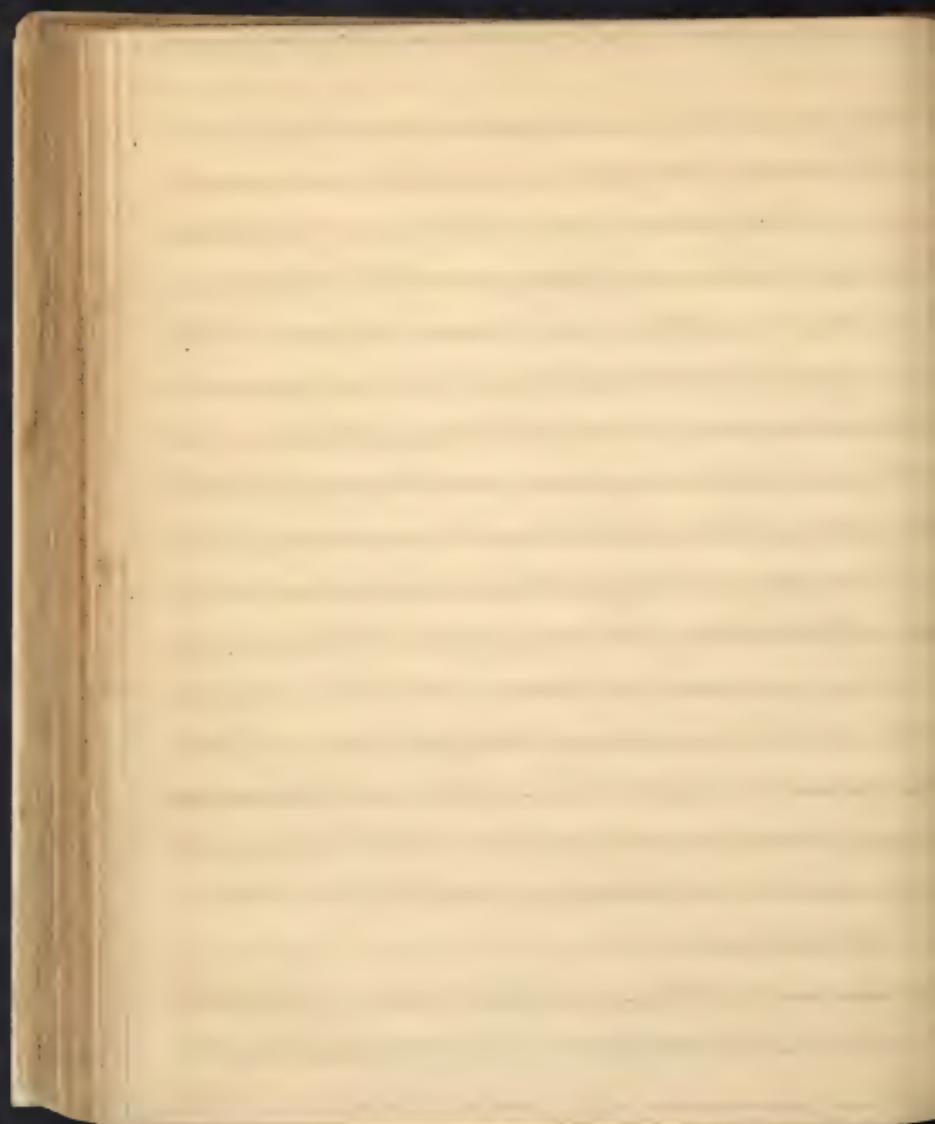
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The pustules here, were not so compact as in Case 1<sup>st</sup> - but assumed  
to some measure the character of Syphilis Sparsa - on the hand  
which was its original place of attack, it appeared similar to the  
Syphilis Fissurata, as mentioned in the history of James Francis.  
It was now evidently invading the fore-arm, in irregular & pro-  
miscuously-distributed, patches. The itching was often so intolerable  
that she was compelled (in her language) "to tear her hand nearly  
bare" to obtain a temporary relief. A like application of the  
Mord-Root was resorted to, and after a patient and steady perse-  
verance in its use, for two weeks, the eruption was completely remo-  
ved - smooth, shining spots on the cuticle alone remaining; to show  
where the disease had existed: A considerable length of time has now  
elapsed, and she informs me, that since the pustules have dried away  
she can assist in her duties about the house as Masherwoman (with  
out any inconvenience); which she could not do before without its  
producing a most distressing sense of heat & itching. —  
In both patients, attention was paid to keep the Bowels  
quiet, which was easily effected by small and repeated doses  
of Sulphur & Sream, Tart. or Sulph. Soda & Oxygnesia.



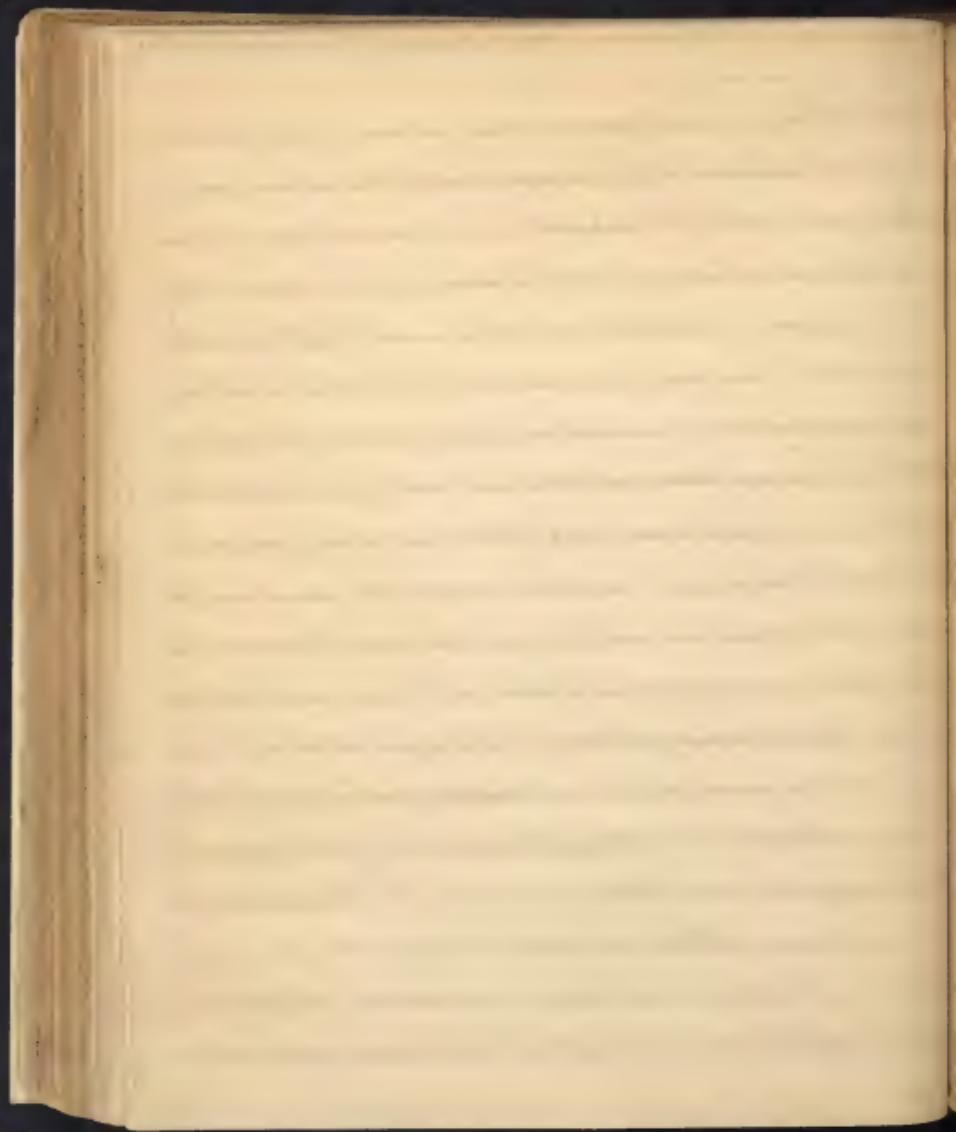
The happy issue of these two cases, justified the conclusion, that it possessed no ordinary properties, and merited the more general attention of the Profession. Hydrotic affections are at best, tedious & troublesome to contend with; baffling frequently the most persevering exertions, causing even Practitioners to become disatisfied with the impotence of their remedies & making the patient despondent.— Having charge about this time of the Allen's Select Ward, to which all cutaneous disorders are generally sent; two cases of Linea Capitis, came under my notice, which had resisted every attempt at their cure. Tar Tincture— the Camph. Mercurial Ointment, and what is known in Gibson's House by the name of Gibson's Tincture, which had been uniformly successful, seemed to make no impression whatever on the disease; and with these facts before me, I felt almost disposed, to abandon them as hopeless.— The Sanguinaria Canadensis however recurred to me, and I tried it merely for experiments sake— with what advantage, a recital of the following cases will exhibit —

Roger Scantling aged 9 years, was brought from one of the Nurses, where Linea Capitis, appeared to be a contagion; for 13 or 14.

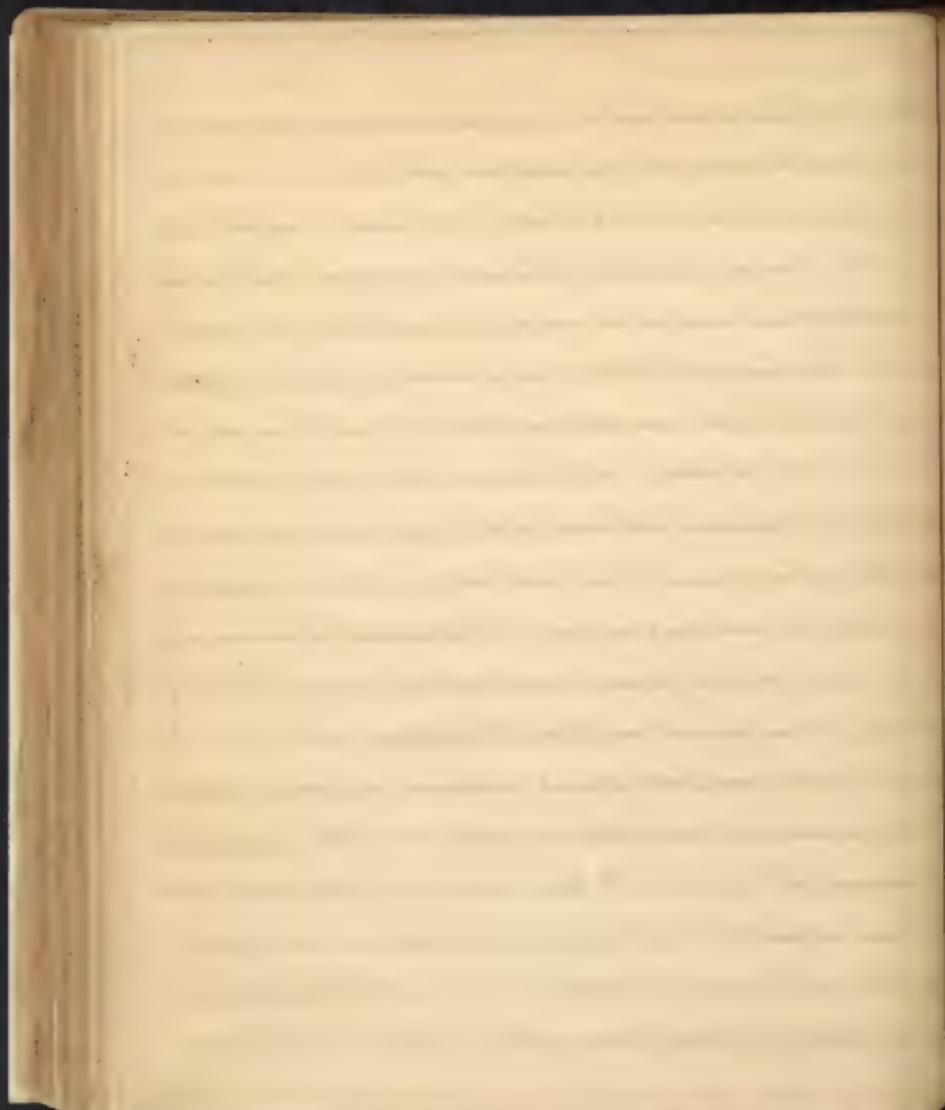


children; there was scarcely one, who was not more or less affected;—  
and this I attributed to their sleeping in pairs, and one combining  
a Q.S. for the whole. The majority of them got well from the use  
of the ointment introduced into the practice of this House, by Dr.  
Gibson, composed of Sulphur-Carb-Ammonia & Hog's Lard, with  
the exception of two, whose cases are now to be detailed.—

The common routine of practice had been gone through, and yet  
Scantling's disease proved irradicable. I directed his head to be  
shaved, and well cleansed with Castile Soap daily—an occasio-  
nal dose of medicine to regulate his alimentary canal, and the  
ulcers on the scalp, to be washed repeatedly, with the same liquid  
which had been employed in Impetigo; His diet was rather nu-  
tritious than otherwise, allowing him Beef & Mutton, but restric-  
ting salt provisions. After an unremitting continuance in this  
plan of treatment for 8 or 9 days, the sores on the head began to  
heal kindly—the scabs falling off and at the termination of a  
two weeks' course of Blood-Root system, I enjoyed the pleasure of  
discharging him cured. Since then he has remained perfectly free  
from the complaint & scarcely a vestige of the disease is observable.

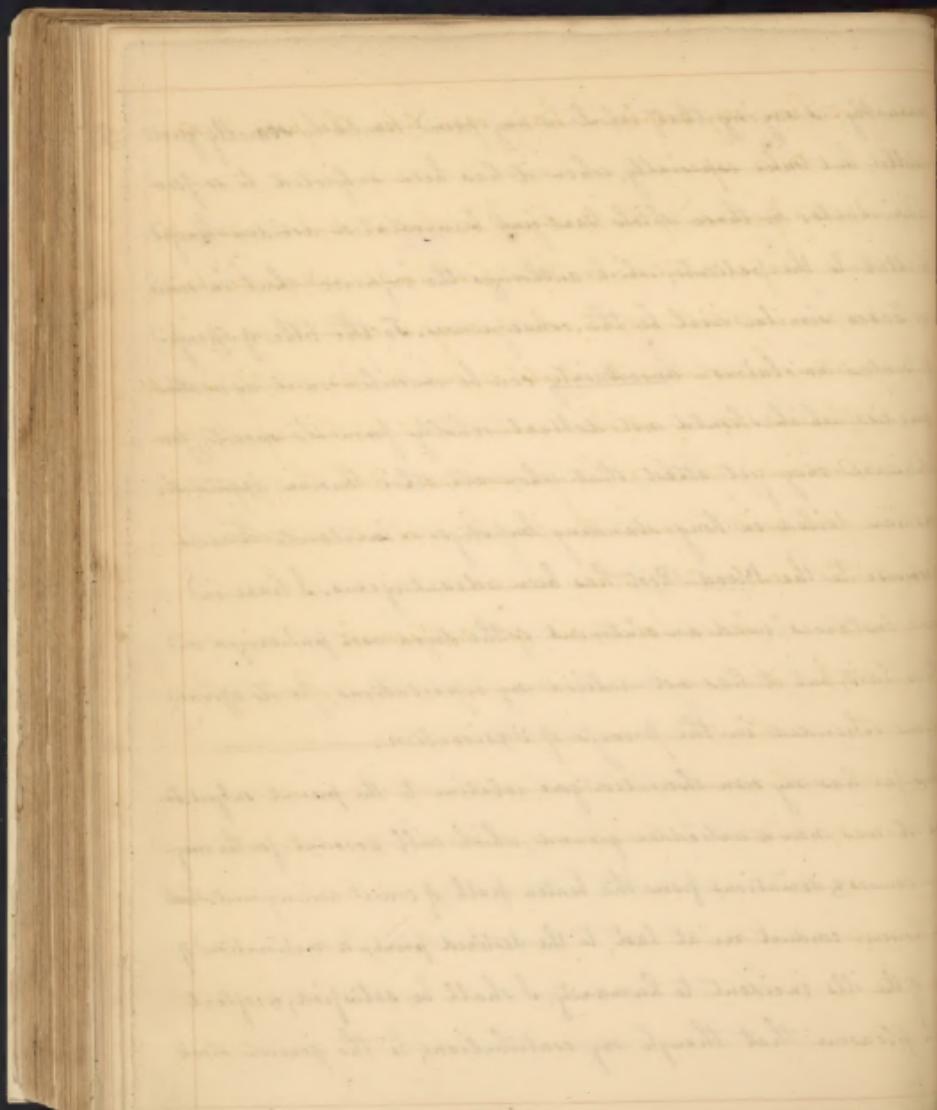


John Barthely 6 years of age, was another patient in the Ward, laboring under the same malady; connected with this, he also had a scrophulous ulcer on the neck. This being likewise a very obstinate case, there was a repetition of the same practice; and though the improvement was not so rapid here as in the above instance, yet at the close of the third week, I could in reality say "Iam  
regi opus!" The ulcer was still unattended to, and being absent from the house, for three days, the Nurse had (for what reason I know not) bathed it frequently with some of the liquid, which remained in the Vial. On my return to the Ward, noticing the altered appearance of the neck, for from being an open-ill-looking sore, it was now nicely filling up; my curiosity prompted me to ask the cause of this change; when the Nurse informed me, that the Panacea as he styled it, had been the sole agent. No internal medicines were administered, nothing resorted to, but a topical application of the Sanguineum  
Canadensis. These facts, with those mentioned in Dr. Hendrie's Thesis, are sufficient I should suppose, to elicit at least, further inquiries into its reputed virtues; and ascertain whether or not it is entitled to more extensive trial. That it will succeed



insinually, is saying that which at any period, would be scarcely justifiable; but more especially, when it has been subjected to so few experiments. In those which have just been related, decided benefit resulted to the patients; which authorizes the inference, that in similar cases, similar will be the consequences. To the title of Speapis, it presumes no claims - uncertainty can be inscribed on it, as on other remedies, which should not detract wholly from its merit, for Experience may yet attest, that when all other known applications have failed in long-standing Impetigo or inveterate Tinea, recourse to the Blood-Root has been advantageous. I have in some instances, used an ointment of the dried root pulverized and Hogs Lard, but it has not realized my expectations, for its efficacy seems expended in the process of Exsiccation.

Thus far has my own observation gone, relative to the present subject. To me it was new & untrodden ground, which will account for the irregular courses, & deviations from the beaten path, of concert arrangement. Should they however conduct me at last, to the destined point, - a mitigation of any of the ills incident to humanity, I shall be satisfied; & reflect with pleasure, that though my contributions to the general stock,



have not been very ample; I have even like the poor Widow,  
added a Mite —

The Modus operandi of this medicine is what I cannot undertake  
to explain, and speculation on the subject would perhaps be attended  
with no very important results. Astringency is certainly one of its  
characteristics, but whether its effects depend on this quality is dan-  
gerous, as there are many articles superior to it in this respect, from  
the application of which no benefit accrued: With the fact of its  
having done good, I must therefore be content, and say of it,  
what has been said of other remedies, —

"Causa latet, vis est notissima".

Since writing the above, in a conversation with Dr. Stout of Beth-  
lehem Par: on this subject, he informed me, that a Tincture of the  
*Sanguinaria Canadensis*, had been employed by him, in a number  
of cases of Syphilis, with the most decided advantage —

